

The Manager in the Muddy Boots

Charles M. Court

Imagine flying a plane, serving on a ship, or commanding a ground convoy. Make it challenging; make it real. Put yourself in some tough situations in Iraq or Afghanistan.

What must race through your mind every day of your assignment? For example, would you worry about conditions in the combat environment, the geography, the threat, the rules of engagement, the other people in your unit, doctrine, policy, facilities, and the overall mission? Yes, you would worry about all of that and more. Any combat job is a tough job. You want to do the mission, and you want to get yourself—and the rest of your unit—back home OK.

Court is the director of requirements management training at the Defense Acquisition University.

When you return, you receive congratulations on your successful operational tour and a transfer to a more peaceful assignment. Now you need to apply your previous combat experience to your new position as a requirements manager. In addition, you quickly need to understand the Joint Capabilities Integration and Development System (JCIDS); the planning, programming, budgeting, and execution (PPBE) system; and the Defense Acquisition System (DAS) so you can communicate the warfighters' requirements. The men and women now in the field count on you to represent them. They need new systems and the best, most reliable technology to complete their missions, to counter the threats, and to come home safely.

The Point of View From the Field

So who is this manager wearing boots covered with mud (or dust or salt water), who may be still in the field or freshly arrived from an operational assignment? Who is this requirements manager? How does the requirements manager help acquisition? At the same time, how does the requirements manager help operational units facing new, dynamic threats?

The formal definition is that the requirements manager is a military manager or Department of Defense civilian manager charged with assessing, developing, validating, and prioritizing requirements and associated requirements products through the JCIDS process. But this definition fails to mention four key points.

First, no one person does all four tasks of assessing, developing, validating, and prioritizing. Managers, specialists, and decision makers assume different tasks within the formal definition. While their current combat experience is critical, requirements managers fresh from operational assignments will need to work with those who have limited or dated operational experience.

Second, the requirements manager is the warfighters' representative within the "Big A" processes of JCIDS, PPBE, and DAS. New requirements managers, fresh from the field, may be rich in operational experience, but they need to be able to function in the elaborate and confusing Big A acquisition processes. They must interact with managers who are well-versed in their specialties within acquisition and budgeting.

Third, because current operational experience is critical, requirements managers remain responsible for stating and defending capability gaps, for collaborating in developing requirements documents, and for helping move those documents through all three DoD systems.

Finally, requirements managers remain responsible because operational feedback will continue to come directly from units in the field. In turn, requirements managers remain accountable to the field units to ensure Big A acquisition meets the warfighters' needs.


Getting the three systems—JCIDS, PPBE, and DAS—to work together is not easy. Most senior program managers and budgeting personnel have often spent years learning the intricacies of acquisition and PPBE. Coming straight from a field assignment, requirements managers usually have a very short time to switch from the challenge of operations to the pitfalls of acquisition, financial management, and documenting requirements. That switch can become especially challenging when the requirements manager encounters specialists with outdated information, obsolete points of view, or outright inflexible approaches. Forcefully demanding things will not help solve the challenge of dealing with other managers with conflicting priorities. To be effective, managers within all three systems must recognize how they can work together.

Getting the Three Systems Together

All too often, requirements managers begin at a disadvantage. Because assignments tend to be short, military managers are often on a short tour before either going back to the field or retiring from the Service. Civilian requirements managers risk losing their insight into field conditions as their assignments keep them from the most current operations. In either case, the requirements manager with limited training and scant acquisition experience must interact with trained specialists and experienced experts in confusing disciplines such as acquisition, systems engineering, finance, and contracting. Any naïve hope that everyone will agree on how to support warfighters quickly evaporates.

Recall that the three key processes of JCIDS, PPBE, and DAS must work in concert to deliver capabilities to the warfighter. The analysis, requirements generation, and document validation processes of JCIDS may seem worlds removed from operational experiences. The requirements manager needs to learn to master the needs-driven requirements-generation process, but problems begin to multiply when JCIDS-generated requirements mesh with the event-driven acquisition process and the calendar-driven budgeting cycle. Working in concert ultimately comes down to people working together and doing their best to make their respective system work with the other systems to deliver reliable, effective military hardware.

So how do the best requirements managers get JCIDS, PPBE, and DAS work together? The best managers in all three areas have experience, education, and mutual respect towards managers in the other disciplines. Unfortunately, mutual respect and understanding can break down, and those breakdowns waste time and opportunities. In the worst situations, managers find themselves almost speaking different languages because of differences in education, training, priorities, and points of view sharpened by various hard-earned experiences. The requirements managers fresh from the field need insight into all three management systems to be effective.



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Situation Awareness, Requirements Creep, and the Central Problem

Such insight must combine into something akin to situational awareness, which is so important in an operational situation. Recall everything a warfighter must consider in an operational situation (conditions in the combat environment, the geography, the threat, the rules of engagement, the other people in your unit, doctrine, policy, facilities, and the overall mission). Understanding system capabilities, the operational environment, and the current state of affairs is not unlike having a situational awareness of the different Big A acquisition systems, the possible scheduling disconnects, and the overall goal. As the military services strive to make their training more effective in land, sea, and air operations, combat-experienced requirements managers may prefer live-fire situations to the initial confusion of facing the meetings, reviews, and documentation of JCIDS requirements generation. Orchestrating the three challenging elements of Big A acquisition requires requirements managers either to develop the requisite situational awareness quickly or to risk losing opportunities to make the acquisition system more effective.

Another common problem is requirements creep. As a program successfully moves through the three systems, other specialists and other managers all too often try to add requirements in the forms of new capabilities and missions. Many managers have experience in which a 10 percent increase in range or a few more knots of speed result in dramatically higher costs, extended schedules, and reduced numbers of operational systems. The problem of

requirements creep gets worse when modifying requirements leads to unanticipated second- and third-order effects. Expanded requirements can also compel implied or derived requirements such as new manufacturing techniques or different environmental conditions. The temptations associated with requirements creep will probably never go away, but the requirements managers must be aware of those temptations so the acquisition system makes timely deliveries of effective, affordable hardware solutions.

The central problem remains communications breakdowns. Industry leaders have often complained about individual management units making decisions in the absence of communications with other units. For example, car designers would send their design to the manufacturing unit, and the manufacturing unit would expect marketing to sell whatever came off the assembly line. The manufacturers would often state that they could streamline manufacturing and hold down costs if they had input into the design process. The marketers would note that they could sell more if

the designers and the manufacturers had better insight into the sales market. DoD cannot permit the three elements of Big A acquisition to operate independently; the threat is too dynamic and the stakes are too high. Preparing requirements managers has become a priority for the under secretary of defense for acquisition, technology and logistics because DoD recognizes the need for JCIDS, PPBE, and DAS to work together.

As the requirements manager faces managers and decision makers with different points of view, he must strive for streamlined communications to keep the various processes focused. Every Big A manager and decision maker must ultimately agree on what the warfighters need; otherwise, capabilities will never reach the warfighter. Thus, the requirements managers need to know the terminologies and the procedures within all three components of Big A acquisitions. Even managers in the same military service cannot communicate without a common terminology. Understanding and applying the knowledge of different procedures combines with timing inputs into the system—inputs such as analysis results and requirements documents—so those contributions lead to developing effective solutions.

What DAU is Doing

Section 801 of the 2007 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) tasked the under secretary of defense for acquisition, technology and logistics, in conjunction with the Defense Acquisition University, to develop requirements management training. Under this mandate, for the last two years, DAU leaders have been mindful that the requirements man-

agers need to become familiar with current DoD priorities, terminology, and procedures quickly and comprehensively. That awareness led to the development of the online learning module, Capabilities-Based Planning (CLM 041), and the distance-learning course, Core Concepts for Requirements Management (RQM 110). The courses begin the requirements manager certification process that will continue with a proposed classroom course, RQM 310 (course name to be determined). General officer- and Senior Executive Service-level certification will remain available through the existing course, Requirements Executive Management Overview (RQM 403).

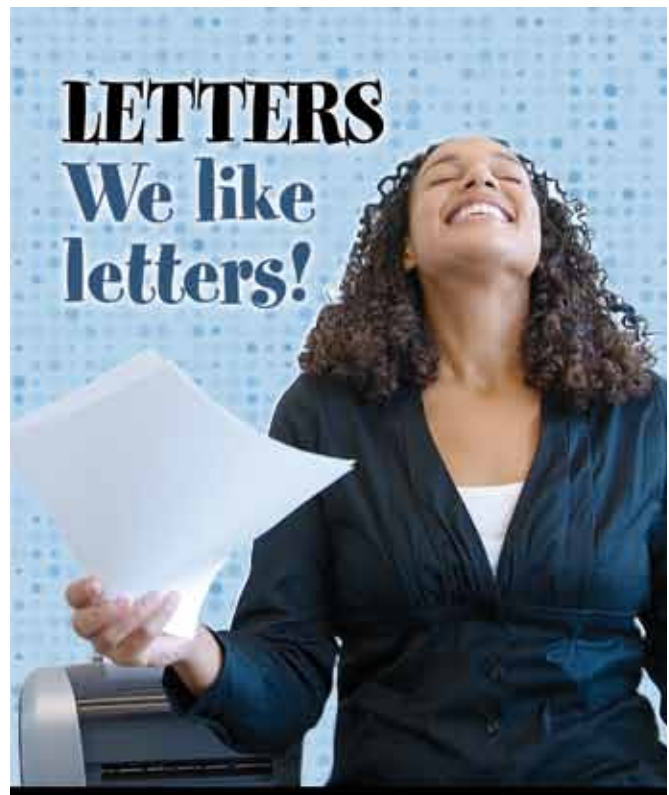
To bridge the gap between introductory-level RQM 110 and the advanced-level RQM 310—and to offer just-in-time training—the DAU Requirements Training Directorate has proposed developing three requirements management learning modules: Requirements Tradeoffs (CLR 160), Capability-Based Assessments (CLR 250), and Developing Requirements (CLR 252). CLR 160 will help students understand how changing or adding requirements leads to higher costs and to scheduling delays. CLR 250 places emphasis on how the JCIDS depends on analysis to determine systems' requirements; and it will help potential capability-based assessment team leaders and team members organize an assessment, evaluate the quality of an assessment, and determine the appropriate follow-on efforts. CLR 252 will help students apply capability-based assessment results to develop key performance parameters for new systems.

How Important is This Effort?

Serving the warfighter is the requirements manager's mission, and it contributes to the protection of our nation. That combined with the requirements manager's experience and insight make the requirements manager the essential warfighters' representative. All in DoD must ensure Big A acquisition addresses the capability deficiencies the requirements manager identifies. Warfighters regularly face adversaries who are constantly seeking to expand and exploit their advantages. The acquisition community develops, acquires, supplies, and maintains needed tools and services so warfighters have the best, most reliable equipment. Although program managers, test managers, and intelligence experts may have extensive operational experience, the most current knowledge comes from the troops in the field and troops returning home from operational tours. Those returning troops are our most valuable resource to get JCIDS, PPBE, and DAS to work together to meet the warfighters' needs.

All said, acquisition professionals can best serve the warfighters by working with that new manager, the requirements manager, who is wearing boots covered with mud or with salt water or with dust fresh from the field.

The author welcomes comments and questions. You can contact him at charles.court@dau.mil.



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